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SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA: FAO HOLDS SPECIAL EVENT DURING
FAO CONFERENCE

REF: (A) ROME 3949; (B) ROME 3320; (C) ROME 2979;
(D) ROME 1142

1. Summary. During the 33rd session of the FAO Conference, FAO hosted a side event on Avian Influenza on November 23rd (septel on the FAO Conference will be issued shortly). The aim was to update the membership on recent developments and the action taken by FAO as well as provide an outline for future action plans. The event was chaired by Assistant Director General Louise Fresco, with opening remarks by Director General Jacques Diouf. Presentations were made by 1) Joseph Domenech, FAO's Chief Veterinary Officer, on the organization's response to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI); 2) Cao Duc Phat, Vietnamese Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development on the situation in Vietnam; and 3) Harry Paul, Director of Food Quality and Animal Health, Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, on the Avian Influenza lessons learned in The Netherlands. End Summary

Diouf calls for a redoubling of efforts

2. In his opening remarks, Diouf stated that 150 million chickens and ducks have died or been culled since late 2003, and the livelihoods of 200 million people who depend on poultry are at stake. Affected countries in Asia collectively have lost over \$10 billion in revenue. He made a plea for the international community to redouble its efforts to stop Avian Influenza in its tracks at its animal source, noting the importance of the timely reporting of outbreaks. He stressed the need to collect and share virus strain information to better understand and control the disease, noting that FAO and the Office International des Epizooties (OIE) have jointly appealed to governments to improve this exchange of information. Diouf stated that, at a pledging meeting scheduled for January 2006 in Beijing, FAO and the OIE would reveal a funding plan of up to \$500 million for short and medium term projects over the next three years. Lastly, he noted that partnerships play a critical role in stamping out Avian Influenza

FAO concerned over quality of PRC vaccination campaign

3. Domenech stated that the situation is evolving rapidly into an unprecedented crisis, yet efforts are underway across Asia to control the spread of HPAI. For example, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has launched a massive poultry vaccination campaign, although he admitted FAO has concerns over the quality of this campaign. Although there have been some cases of outbreaks, the situation in Thailand has been contained due to the highly effective campaign led by Thai authorities. Based on the success of the three sub-regional technical cooperation programs (TCP) FAO launched in South-East Asia, East Asia and South Asia, it will launch five more in other sub-regions at risk: Eastern Europe and the Caucasus; Middle East; North Africa; West Africa; and Eastern Southern Africa. These TCPs will form a network of surveillance, information and diagnostic capabilities.

Vietnam vaccinating 150 million chickens

4. Phat stated that Vietnam is focusing much more attention on surveillance and reporting, and conducting increased patrols of villages, market places and border posts. The Government is compensating farmers at \$1 per chicken and approved a national vaccination plan totaling

\$15.3 million for 2005-2006. From September to early November, 100,000 people were deployed to vaccinate 80 million poultry; an additional 70 million poultry will be vaccinated by year's end. A massive public health awareness campaign to educate the 8 million households that maintain between 5-10 chickens is also ongoing. Phat closed by requesting \$150 million over the next five years to help build up the country's health care infrastructure, expand training and upgrade bio-security measures.

Late detection in Netherlands spread disease

15. Paul stated that the five days it took for the Government to confirm an H7N7 Avian outbreak in the Netherlands had far-reaching consequences that could have been prevented. Nearly 2,000 civilian and military personnel were deployed in a military-like operation to destroy 30 million chickens (1/3 of the country's commercial stock). Of the 600 people tested, 80 tested positive virologically, and those who became ill contracted conjunctivitis while one veterinarian died. As a result, the Government instituted an early warning system, which includes monitoring egg production operations for signs of sick chickens, blood-tapping flocks, and a widespread bio-safety campaign. Paul called for more capacity building worldwide to stop the disease at its source, more human and veterinary research and flexibility in responding to this "moving target," and greater cooperation between the veterinary industry and the private sector.

Membership responds

17. During an open discussion, many FAO member states expressed support and concern. The U.S. recognized the important groundwork already laid by FAO and its partner agencies, and thanked member states for their dedication and commitment to the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza (IPAPI). Canada offered FAO more coordinated veterinary support, while Norway announced a \$1 million contribution to FAO to support the three TCPs in Asia and another \$700,000 to support the joint FAO/WHO effort to contain Avian Influenza in North Korea. Norway also welcomed a common UN appeal for burden-sharing among member states.

18. Sudan stated it had established a ministerial committee on Avian Influenza and instituted an import ban from affected countries, and queried whether bans from Europe should also be instituted (Dr. Paul assured Sudan that Europe has had cases of low-pathogenic strains and thus European imports are safe). The United Arab Emirates reported that laboratories and veterinary services were being set up or upgraded and an emergency national committee was also established. The PRC also spoke on the dozen or so animal disease control measures it had instituted and suggested establishing a vaccine development center in-country. Libya stated it had spent Euros 10 million on internal emergency measures thus far. Lastly, Swaziland expressed its gratitude to FAO for having the pre-emptive insight to establish three TCPs in Africa, where Avian Influenza poses the most serious threat due to the continent's lack of readiness and infrastructure.

FAO to work with U.S. PVOs to expand surveillance abroad

19. In a side discussion with FAO staff, USUN-Rome learned that FAO's liaison office in Washington has held meetings with OCHA and InterAction to discuss the use of U.S. PVOs already working in affected countries to expand surveillance. FAO would provide guidelines and/or training on early warning signs for infected fowl. Within the next few weeks, InterAction will submit to FAO a map depicting where PVO staff from agencies like CARE, CRS, WVI, etc., are positioned and FAO will respond as to whether these placements can be useful to the organization's efforts in the region. An expected outcome is the expansion of FAO's NGO networks in the field through these U.S. PVOs. The FAO/Washington liaison office is also communicating with U.S. veterinary institutes and schools to establish a roster of possible veterinarians and consultants, and is a member of the IBM Steering Committee on Avian Influenza, which is working to integrate animal and human health data through data mining.

110. Fresco ended the event with five take-home points: 1) the key to Avian Influenza control and prevention is on the animal side; 2) increased awareness equals increased public communication and risk communication; 3) stronger political will is needed at all levels; 4) increased resources are needed for science, technology and research on containing

the spread; and 5) international cooperation is critical.

11. USUN Rome will continue to cover and widely disseminate information on FAO Avian Influenza activities.

BRAKEL